

CALVIN'S CAMELS

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The following is excerpted from *The Calvinism Debate*, which is available as a free eBook at www.wayoflife.org.

“Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24).

Having read John Calvin's *Institutes* and having studied the writings of many Calvinists both ancient and contemporary, I am convinced that Calvin was guilty of straining at gnats and swallowing camels. To accept Calvinism (in any of its forms) is to deny the plain teaching of dozens of Scriptures. In fact, it is to deny the entire tenor of Scripture.

I have examined Calvinism many times during the 40 years since I was saved. The first time was shortly after I was converted, when I was in Bible College, and Calvinism was one of the many topics that were strenuously discussed by the students. I had never heard of Calvinism before that, and I didn't know what to think of it, so I read Arthur Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* and a couple of other titles on the subject with a desire to understand it and to know whether or not it was scriptural. Some of the students became Calvinists, but I concluded that though Calvinism makes some good points about the sovereignty of God and though I like the way it exalts God above man and though I agree with its teaching that salvation is 100% of God and though I despise and reject the shallow, manipulative, man-centered soul winning scheme that is so common among independent Baptists and though it does seem to be supported by a few Scriptures, the bottom line to me is that it ends up contradicting far too many plain Scriptures.

In the year 2000, I was invited to preach at a conference on Calvinism at Heritage Baptist University in Greenwood, Indiana, that was subsequently held in April of 2001. The conference was opposed to Calvinism, and I agreed to speak, because I have been in sympathy with such a position ever since I first examined the subject in Bible College. Before I put together a message for the conference, though, I wanted to re-examine Calvinism in a more thorough manner. I contacted Dr. Peter Masters in London, England, and discussed the subject of Calvinism with him. I told him that I love and respect him in Christ, and I also love and respect his predecessor, Charles Spurgeon, though I do not agree with either of them on Calvinism (or some other issues, in fact). I told Dr. Masters that I wanted him to tell me what books he would recommend so that I could properly understand what he believes on the subject (knowing that there are many varieties of Calvinism). I did not want to misrepresent anything. Among other things, Dr. Masters

recommended that I read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and Iain Murray's *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper-Calvinists*, which I did.

More recently I have re-investigated Calvinism. I read Dave Hunt's "*What Love Is This?*" and "*A Calvinist's Honest Doubts Resolved by Reason and God's Amazing Grace.*" I read "*Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*" by Dave Hunt and James White. I carefully re-read Arthur Pink's "*The Sovereignty of God*" as well as the "*Westminster Confession of Faith.*" I also studied about 100 pages of materials published in defense of Calvinism by the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore, a Bible Presbyterian school.

As best as I know how, I have studied these materials with the sole desire to know the truth and with a willingness to follow the truth wherever it leads.

Thus, while I have not read every book on this subject that could be recommended by my readers, I have made a considerable effort to understand Calvinism and not to misrepresent it (though I have learned that a non-Calvinist will ALWAYS be charged with misrepresentation).

The Calvinist will doubtless argue that I simply don't understand Calvinism properly, and to this I reply that if Calvinism is that complicated it can't be the truth. If a reasonably intelligent preacher who has studied and taught the Bible diligently for 40 years and has published a Bible encyclopedia and many other Bible study books can study Calvinism with a desire to understand it properly and still not understand it, then it is far too complicated to be the truth! The apostle Paul warned that it is the devil that makes theology that complicated. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Of course, Calvinism is not simple by any means, and this is one reason why it tends to produce an elitist mentality. To understand Calvinism, one must deal with compatibalism, monergism versus synergism, electing grace vs. irresistible grace, effectual calling vs. general calling, effective atonement vs. hypothetical atonement, libertarian free will vs. the bondage of the will, objective grace and subjective grace, natural ability and moral ability, mediate vs. immediate imputation of Adam's sin, supralapsarianism, sublapsarianism, infralapsarianism, desiderative vs. decretive will, and antecedent hypothetical will, to name a few!

The Calvinist will further argue that the reason I have studied Calvinism and rejected it is because I think man should be equal to God. Calvinists invariably claim that the non-Calvinist doesn't believe in God's sovereignty. I can't speak for others, but this non-Calvinist certainly believes in God's sovereignty. God is God and He can do whatsoever He pleases whensoever He pleases. As one man said, "Whatever the Bible says, I believe; the Bible says the whale swallowed Jonah, and I believe it; and if the Bible said that Jonah

swallowed the whale, I would believe that!” If the Bible taught that God sovereignly selects some sinners to go to heaven and sovereignly elects the rest to go to hell or that He chooses only some to be saved and allows the rest to be destroyed, I would believe it, because I believe the Creator God is Lord of His creatures, and man cannot tell God what is right or wrong.

But every time I have studied Calvinism I have come away convinced that it simply contradicts too many Scriptures, that it is built more upon human logic and philosophy than upon the plain teaching of God’s Word. Whatever divine election means, and it is certainly an important doctrine of the Word of God, it cannot mean what Calvinism concludes, because to accept that position requires one to strain at gnats and swallow camels. The gnats are Calvinist extra-scriptural arguments and reasoning and the camels are Scriptures understood plainly by their context.

Consider some gnats that Calvinists strain at. The Calvinist reasons that if God is sovereign than man can’t have a will and cannot resist Him. The Calvinist reasons that if the sinner is dead then he can’t respond to the gospel, and if he cannot respond to the gospel and if faith itself is a sovereignly bestowed gift (based on an erroneous exegesis of Ephesians 2:8-9) then the elect must be born again before he can exercise faith. The Calvinist reasons that since God works all things after His own will then if He truly willed for all men to be saved, He would save all men.

In each of these cases, the Calvinist applies human logic to the issue rather than a clear statement from Scripture, and the Scriptures he uses to support his doctrine do no such thing. He thus strains at gnats while swallowing hundreds of clear Scriptures that overthrow his doctrine.

CALVIN’S CAMELS

Following are just a few of the camels that John Calvin swallowed when he followed Augustine, that “Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church,” into the error of “sovereign election” and when he reasoned that God would not be sovereign if man could reject Him and if salvation could be accepted or rejected by the sinner.

I realize that a staunch Calvinist has an answer for everything. He can flee immediately into his stronghold of making clever and intricate man-made distinctions between electing grace and common grace, between degrees of the love of God, between desiderative vs. decretive will and antecedent hypothetical will, you name it.

I am not writing this report for such a person. I am writing it for the simple Bible believer who loves God’s Word and who has not been overawed by intellectual brilliance and brainwashed by human theology.

GOD CAN BE LIMITED -- “Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41).

According to Calvinism, if man can resist God or thwart His purposes then God is no longer a Sovereign God and man must be Sovereign. Thus they claim that it is impossible that man could accept or reject God’s salvation. But the fact is that the Bible says man does resist and reject God on every hand, and this has been going on since the earliest days of his history. Adam rejected God’s Word. Cain rejected it. Noah’s generation rejected it. The men gathered at the Tower of Babel rejected it. When the Psalmist recounts the experience of Israel in the wilderness, he emphasizes the fact that Israel did *not* do God’s will. He describes them as “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psa. 78:8) who “refused to walk in his law” (Psa. 78:10). He then makes this amazing statement: “they limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psa. 78:41). According to Calvinist thinking, this is not possible and if it were possible it would mean that God is not sovereign, but it is obvious that Calvinism is wrong on both counts. For God to make man in His own image with a will and an ability to make real choices and for God to allow man to exercise his will even in the matter of receiving salvation does not make God any less sovereign than had He created a robot. And it will not do to allow that man can resist God in some things but not in the matter salvation. If man can resist and reject and limit God in any way and God can still be God, then God can still be God if He offers salvation to all and some receive it and some reject it, as the Bible so plainly says. “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

JESUS WOULD BUT ISRAEL WOULD NOT -- “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Mat. 23:37).

Here we see that it was the will and desire of the Son of God to save Israel throughout her history, and He sent His prophets to her, but He was refused. Christ would; Israel would not. Knowing that Christ is God, this teaches us that God’s will can be thwarted by man’s will?

Arthur Pink says, “But did those tears make manifest a disappointed God? Nay, verily. Instead, they displayed a perfect Man” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 199).

Thus, according to the Calvinist, Jesus’ statement in Matt. 23:37 does not teach that God’s will was ever thwarted by man’s will but merely expresses the human side of Jesus’ compassionate nature. According to Calvin, God cannot be disappointed, because that would mean He is not sovereign (according to Calvin’s own predetermined definition), but this flies in the face of the Scriptures in literally thousands of places.

To say that Jesus was speaking in Matthew 23:37 as man but not as God is both ridiculous and heretical. Jesus told His disciplines, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). In Matt. 23:37 Jesus is speaking as the eternal Son of God, yea, as Jehovah God, as the very same God who had sent the prophets to Israel throughout her rebellious career and who had desired to give her peace, but THEY WOULD NOT.

GOD STRETCHED FORTH HIS HANDS TO ISRAEL BUT ISRAEL REJECTED HIM -- “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts” (Isaiah 65:2).

Here is the same type of statement that Jesus Himself made in Matt. 23:37. We see that God wanted to save Israel and continually reached out to them, but God’s message and salvation were resisted and rejected.

THE JEWS RESISTED THE HOLY SPIRIT -- “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

Stephen charged his Jewish persecutors with resisting the Holy Spirit. Here again we see that the Holy Spirit strives with men and that they can willfully resist Him. The Calvinist answer this by claiming that the “bondage of the will” works only one way, meaning that the unsaved can reject the truth, but they cannot, on the other hand, receive the truth. According to this doctrine, only the elect are given the ability to believe the gospel while the non-elect are left in their totally depraved condition with their will in bondage and unable to believe. The Bible nowhere teaches this. Instead, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, from Cain to those who follow the Antichrist, men are called by God, and are expected to respond and obviously are able to respond and are condemned when they do not. That some do and some do not respond to the light that God gives is not because only some are pre-ordained to respond.

THE JEWS BROUGHT THE WRATH OF GOD UPON THEMSELVES -- “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

According to this passage, the Jews that killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted the early believers were not sovereignly reprobated to that evil work. They filled up their sins and brought God’s wrath upon them by their own actions.

Note, too, that Paul says the Jews forbade the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles “that they might be saved.” Thus we see that the Gentiles to whom the gospel would otherwise have been preached could have been saved through that preaching.

THE BELIEVER’S FAITH CONDEMNS THE WORLD -- “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7). “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here” (Mat. 12:41-42).

Noah, the Queen of Sheba, and the citizens of Nineveh condemn the unbelieving world, because they demonstrate that men can repent and believe.

This demonstrates that Noah’s faith and the Queen of Sheba’s faith and Nineveh’s repentance were not a product of “sovereign election.” Had it been a case of sovereign election, the unbeliever could not be condemned thereby, because he could reply, “But I wasn’t elected.”

THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED BY THE BLOOD CAN COUNT IT AN UNHOLY THING AND DESPISE THE SPIRIT OF GOD -- “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:29).

Either this verse means that a saved person can lose his salvation, or it means that a person can come close to being saved without actually being regenerated and can then turn away finally from salvation by rejecting the efficacy of the blood and the gospel of grace. We believe that it teaches the latter. In our church planting ministry we have seen many Hindus and Buddhists attend church services and purchase Bibles and look eagerly into the things of Christ and even desire to be baptized and publicly testify that they believed the gospel only to finally turn away and to return to human religion and idolatry and to renounce the blood of Christ and salvation by grace. These were not sanctified in the sense of salvation, but they were sanctified in the sense of having been enlightened and convicted by the Spirit and in the sense of having professed to believe in the covenant or gospel of grace.

This verse contradicts the Calvinist doctrines of Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace. At the least this verses teaches that the blood of Christ was available to them for salvation but that they rejected it.

JESUS REBUKED THE CITIES OF ISRAEL BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT -- “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matt. 11:20-24).

Jesus did not deal with men on the basis of sovereign election and sovereign reprobation. He dealt with them on the basis of human responsibility to respond to the divine call of repentance. Christ teaches here that men not only are responsible to repent but they can repent if they will. If they could not have repented, why are they upbraided as if they could have repented? If some men cannot repent, why are all men commanded to repent (Acts 17:30)?

JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY THAT GOD’S WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN -- “And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth” (Lk. 11:2).

This means, of course, that God’s will is not currently done on earth as it is in heaven, which means that God’s sovereignty does not mean that His will is always done. Man can thwart God’s will -- not ultimately as far as His eternal plan goes, but in many ways and in many times.

GOD INVITES ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH TO BE SAVED -- “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

If words mean anything, this universal divine invitation means that God earnestly desires to save all men and all men can be saved, and this was written during the Old Testament dispensation before the coming of Christ.

GOD INVITES ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY TO COME AND DRINK FREELY -- “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money;

come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:1-3).

As in all other places where a general invitation is given to men to be saved, the Calvinist attempts to limit this passage to the elect, but it is impossible to do so. This particular invitation is to “every one that thirsteth.” The invitation is extended not merely by the God of Israel but by the God of the universe, the God that “made the earth, and created man upon it” (Isa. 45:12), the same God who said in a previous verse, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

God promises to make an everlasting covenant with those who come to Him and promises to give such a one “the sure mercies of David.” That does not limit the invitation to Israel only. God’s covenant with David is fulfilled in his greater Son, the Messiah, and all who are saved participate in that covenant in one way or the other (Acts 13:34-38).

GOD LOVES THE WORLD AND GAVE HIS SON SO THAT WHOSOEVER WILL MIGHT BE SAVED -- “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:14-18).

Arthur Pink is typical in claiming that the world in this passage “does not mean the whole human family” but that is “is used in a general way” and it “must, in the final analysis, refer to the world of God’s people” (*The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 203, 204).

To the contrary, we know that the “world” in John 3:16 here means all men.

First, the universality of this passage is clear from the term “whosoever,” which is used twice in the context. If the term “world” is made to mean anything other than the whole world of men, the term “whosoever” becomes meaningless. If “whosoever” does not mean “whosoever,” Bible words have no certain meaning, and everything is thrown into confusion. The Calvinist says that only those who are sovereignly elected will believe, but the Bible says whosoever believes will be saved and is therefore elected.

Second, the universality of the “world” in this passage is clear from the typology that is used. The brass serpent that was raised up by Moses in the wilderness was sufficient for the salvation of all of the Jews who had been bitten by the snakes, but only those who looked upon it in faith were saved. Likewise, the salvation that Jesus purchased on Calvary is sufficient to save every sinner, but only those who believe are saved.

WHOSOEVER WILL IS INVITED TO COME -- “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

If this verse means what it says, it refutes three of Calvin’s doctrines: that salvation is only for those sovereignly pre-elected, that God does not effectually offer salvation to all, and that the sinner cannot receive salvation.

GOD WILL SAVE ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM -- “But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, WHOSOEVER believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto ALL that call upon him. For WHOSOEVER shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:8-13).

This is another passage that plainly teaches that salvation is for all and whosoever shall call. The Calvinist protests that sinners who are totally depraved cannot call upon the Lord and therefore only those who are sovereignly elected and called and given “the gift of faith” will call upon the Lord. This is to read one’s theology into the Scripture. If the Calvinist doctrines of sovereign election and the bondage of the will and sovereign calling are correct, this passage doesn’t actually mean what it says, and a blessed and glorious universal invitation of salvation to sinners is turned into something that is reserved solely for a pre-selected group of sinners.

As for faith, this passage says that it is nigh to every sinner. Sinners can believe in their hearts upon Christ. They can confess Christ with their mouths. Though they are totally unrighteous and dead in trespasses and sins, this does not mean that they cannot believe the gospel.

WHOSOEVER BELIEVES ON CHRIST OR CALLS UPON HIS NAME SHALL BE SAVED --

“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:46).

“And it shall come to pass, that WHOSOEVER shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

The Bible repeatedly says that salvation is for “whosoever” and a typical Bible-believing non-theologian would conclude from this that any and every sinner today is both invited to come to Christ and by God’s grace CAN come to Christ. To treat the “whosoever shall” of the New Testament as Calvin did, though, is to render them of no effect. According to Calvin, “whosoever” does not really mean whosoever; it means “whosoever of the elect.” Even when Calvin claims, out of one side of his mouth (such as in his commentary on John 3:16), that he agrees that salvation is actually offered to “whosoever will,” he negates it out of the other side by claiming that it is obvious that the non-elect “will not,” so we, in a practical sense, are back to the “whosoever of the elect.”

JESUS INVITED ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY TO COME AND DRINK -- “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If ANY MAN thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

This is the same type of invitation that we have seen in many other passages. It is a “whosoever” invitation. Jesus graciously invites all sinners who recognize their need for salvation to come to Him for satisfaction. Further, the Holy Spirit has come into the world to show men their need of Christ (Jn. 16:8). The only requirement that Jesus states is that one be thirsty for the living water that only God can provide and that he come to Jesus alone for that water and not to any other. Salvation is likened to drinking water. What a simple thing that is!

JESUS INVITED ALL THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN TO COME TO HIM FOR REST -- “Come unto me, ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

A broader invitation to salvation could not be given. Any person that labours and is heavy laden is invited to come to Jesus for rest. This is not an invitation that can somehow be limited to a select number of individuals that were sovereignly predetermined. Jesus’ compassion extends to all sinners, and it is truly His heart’s desire to save all of them.

AS MANY AS RECEIVE JESUS BECOME SONS OF GOD -- “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:10-13).

Jesus was rejected by His own people, the Jewish nation. This fact alone demonstrates that God can be rejected by men. But as many as receive Jesus by believing on His name are given power to become the sons of God. No limitation is given. Salvation is a matter of “AS MANY AS” and “WHOSOEVER.” Notice that faith precedes and is the cause of becoming a son of God. It is not that men are born again to faith, as Calvin taught, but that through faith men are born again. Note, too, that receiving Christ by believing on Him cannot be defined as “the will of man.” The Calvinist argues that if the sinner could believe on Christ it would mean that salvation is of the will of man, but this passage refutes such human logic. We are told plainly in John 1:13 that the new birth is not “of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,” but are told just as plainly that the new birth is by receiving Christ through faith in the previous verses. Verse 13 means that the new birth is not a product of the human will. Man cannot work up the new birth; he cannot will it to happen. It is a miracle of grace that Christ works in the life of the sinner that believes.

GOD HAS ORDAINED THAT THE GOSPEL BE PREACHED TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL AND THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE BE SAVED -- “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

If only the elect can be saved, why does God command that the gospel of “whosoever will” salvation be preached to every sinner? Is God mocking the non-elect by proclaiming to them that He gave His only begotten Son that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish” and that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but that he that believeth not shall be damned”? Some Calvinists divide themselves into two broad categories called “hyper” and “non-hyper” (though the “hyper” do not admit to being hyper but profess themselves to be the genuine Calvinists). The non-hyper-Calvinist claims that God does truly love all men and that the “all” of John 3:16 is truly “all,” which sounds encouraging except that out of the other side of the mouth he says that God only saves the elect and that there is no possibility for the non-elect to be saved and that God’s “love” for the non-elect is admittedly different from His love for the elect. Surely the non-elect, hearing such an argument, would be forced to say, “What kind of strange love is this? Is God mocking me? Is God playing with me as a cat with a mouse? The Bible promises that “whosoever will should not perish, but the Calvinist tells me that only if I am of the elect will I be sovereignly regenerated and given “the gift of faith” and if I am not of the elect I am so dead in my trespasses and sins that there is nothing I can do to be saved, that I cannot even believe on Christ, and that any illumination that God gives me is not effective for salvation. What love is this?” Of course, the Calvinist will instantly reply, “Who art thou that repliest against God! God is God and He can do as He pretty well pleases.” Of course He can do as He pleases, but this issue of whether God genuinely wants all men to be saved and whether it is possible for them to be saved has

the most serious and eternal consequences, and to ask the question as to what constitutes God's love is neither unreasonable nor unscriptural.

GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH -- “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Why does the Lord wait to establish His kingdom? Why has Christ not returned? This verse teaches us that God is waiting for men to be saved, because it is not His sovereign will that any should perish. Since many will perish and since all will not come to repentance, as we know from other Scriptures, then it is obvious that God's will can be resisted and thwarted and rejected by man. It is obvious that the sovereign God created man in such a way that this could be possible, but of course this does not mean that God has ceased to be God. It is Calvinism that defines divine sovereignty as irresistibility. The Bible upholds no such definition.

The Calvinist interprets this verse to mean that God is not willing that any of the elect perish. Arthur Pink says, “The ‘any’ that God is not willing should perish, are the ‘usward’ to whom God is ‘longsuffering’, the ‘beloved’ of the previous verses” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 207).

Our reply to this interpretation is, first of all, if this were the only verse that said that God is not willing that any should perish, we would be able to accept the Calvinist interpretation, but it is not. Isa. 45:22 and Matt. 11:28 and John 3:16 and John 6:40 and Rom. 11:23 and 1 Tim. 1:15-16 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4 and Rev. 22:17 are just some of the Scriptures that say that God wants to save all men.

Thus it is reasonable and Scriptural to believe that the “usward” in 2 Pet. 3:9 is mankind in general as opposed to “the elect” only.

Further, if 2 Peter 3:9 means merely that God is not willing that any of the elect should perish, it uses strange language in light of the Calvinist doctrines of sovereign election and irresistible calling. To say that God is not willing that any should perish is to assume that some can perish.

GOD WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE SAVED -- “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

What does this verse mean? There is no reason to believe that it means anything other than exactly what it says. It is God's sovereign will and desire that all men be saved. Obviously, then, God's will is not always done, and God has ordained that man can

thwart His will, because it is clear from other Scriptures that not all men will be saved. Of course, the Calvinist has all sorts of means by which he reasons away the clear teaching of 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4, but only a committed Calvinist would interpret Scripture in such a manner. For example, some Calvinists claim that God has two types of wills, “desiderative and decretive.” Though He does desire all men to be saved, He has only decreed that the elect be saved. Thus, when 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4 say that God is not willing that any should perish and that He will have all men to be saved, this is merely His “desiderative” will, whereas only those elect sinners who fall under the category of His “decretive” will can actually be saved because they are the only ones who are sovereignly regenerated and given the “gift of faith.” When I told one Calvinist professor that this is mere “mumbo jumbo,” he was very offended, but I don’t see what else it can rightly be called. Of course, this stalwart attempt to reconcile 1 Tim. 3:3-4 and 2 Pet. 3:9 with Calvinism actually creates more problems than it solves, because it admits that God’s desiderative will is not accomplished. Thus, God’s will can indeed be thwarted by man--not His decretive will, mind you, but His desiderative will--which would mean that God has a will that is not sovereign.

JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS -- “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

Calvinism can be read into this passage, as it can be read into any passage (so that “sinners” can become the elect only), but if we take the words of these verses at face value, they mean that Jesus came to save sinners in general as opposed to just a pre-selected group and that God’s salvation of Paul, the chief of sinners, is an encouragement to any sinner to come to Him for salvation. Any sinner can find encouragement from this passage that he can believe on Christ for salvation, because if God would save Paul He will save anyone.

GOD WOULD HAVE MERCY UPON ALL -- “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32).

If the “all” of the first half of this verse means all men, as it obviously does, then it is impossible to interpret the latter half of the verse in any other sense. The same God who has concluded all men in unbelief desires to have mercy upon all men through Jesus Christ. That is His sovereign and express will.

JESUS MADE PROPITIATION NOT FOR BELIEVERS ONLY BUT FOR WHOLE WORLD -- “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

This passage is addressed to “my little children” and those who “have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). Obviously it is addressed, then, to the saved or to those who elsewhere are called “the elect” (Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Therefore, when 1 John 2:2 says Christ “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,” the Bible is obviously and plainly stating that Christ did not die to make satisfaction for the sins of the elect only. The “whole world” means the whole world!

JESUS GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL -- “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:6).

The “all” must be defined in context, and in the context it refers to all men. See 1 Tim. 2:3-5 -- “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” That Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all men demonstrates clearly that His atonement was not limited to the elect and that all men can be saved.

CHRIST RECONCILED THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF AND HAS COMMITTED TO BELIEVERS THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION -- “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

These verses encapsulate the doctrine of atonement as it relates to the world. In verse 18 we see that believers are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, but in verse 19 we see that God intends for the reconciliation process to extend to the entire world. The fact that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” is an obvious teaching of Scripture, but it does not mean, as the Calvinist argues, that all men are automatically saved. (Arthur Pink in *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 62, argues from human logic after this fashion: “If it was offered for all mankind then the debt incurred by every man has been cancelled.”). The universality of Christ’s atonement does not mean that all men are automatically saved but that all men CAN be saved because the work of Christ on the cross is sufficient to save them, but they must receive the word of reconciliation, which, of course, is the gospel. We see in this passage also that the believers are God’s instruments for preaching the “word of reconciliation” to the world. When one sinner believes on Christ he, in turn, is to preach the gospel of reconciliation to others. Since the gospel is to be preached to every person and God is not willing that any should perish, it is obvious that every person has the possibility to be saved through believing it (Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:9).

JESUS BOUGHT THE UNSAVED FALSE TEACHERS WHO TEACH DAMNABLE DOCTRINES AND DENY CHRIST -- “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1).

If the Lord bought these unsaved false teachers, and the Bible plainly says that He did, then the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement falls to the ground.

JESUS TASTED DEATH FOR EVERY MAN -- “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

Again, it is clear in this Scripture that Jesus died to make atonement for every man and not just for the elect.

GOD ELECTS ACCORDING TO HIS FOREKNOWLEDGE -- “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet. 1:2).

The standard Calvinist position on foreknowledge is basically to do away with it by making it the same as fore will, doing away completely with the possibility that God’s election could have anything to do with what He foresees. But the word that Peter uses for “foreknowledge” is a word that means simply that God foreknew what would happen. It is the Greek word “prognosis,” which is a word still used commonly in English. When a doctor gives the prognosis of a disease, he describes the normal progression of the disease. He basically is able to tell the future because he knows beforehand what will happen. The doctrine of “foreknowledge,” if not redefined by Calvinism, goes a long way, though not all of the way, toward explaining the mystery of how God could elect but man could choose. There is more to election than foreknowledge, but the fact remains that God’s Word teaches us that foreknowledge is involved, and it cannot be redefined to mean “foreordination.”

In his attempt to redefine “foreknowledge” and to mold it into “foreordination,” the Calvinist uses Acts 2:23, which says that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The Calvinist claims that determinate counsel and foreknowledge is the same thing, but it is evident that these are, in fact, two different things. The Calvinist points out that “determinate counsel” precedes “foreknowledge,” but what he fails to observe is the “and.” Acts 2:23 does not say that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel which is the foreknowledge of God”; it says that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel AND foreknowledge of God.” That God elects

according to His foreknowledge does not mean that He elects solely according to His determinate counsel, and this fact does not make God any less God.

JESUS WARNED MEN TO HEAR HIS WORD PROPERLY OR BE JUDGED -- “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Lk. 8:18).

Jesus put the responsibility for hearing His Word upon the shoulders of His listeners. If they would hear and make the effort to seek God and understand, they would be given more. If they would not, they would be judged. There is no sovereign election here.

JESUS TOLD THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS THAT THEY WOULD NOT COME TO HIM THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE -- “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

He did not say they could not come because of their “total depravity”; He said they would not come. It was a matter of their own wills. He did not say they were not sovereignly elected or that they were foreordained to condemnation. He rebuked them because they were given light and had rejected it. This verse and countless others teaches that the sinner has a will that he can exercise contrary to God, that God’s will is not “sovereign” in the sense that it cannot be opposed.

FAITH COMES FROM MAN’S HEART -- “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:11-15).

The Parable of the Sower teaches us that faith is something that sinners can exercise and that the difference between men’s hearts and their response to the gospel is not that of sovereign election but is a matter of their own wills. The Lord Jesus tells us that the Word of God falls upon four different types of human hearts. All men are sinners, but all sinners do not respond to the Word of God in the same manner.

The first type of sinner hears the Word of God but the devil comes and takes it out of the heart “lest they should believe and be saved.” This is explained in Matt. 13:19 -- “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, AND UNDERSTANDETH IT NOT, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” The first

type of person does not believe because he doesn't make the effort to understand the gospel and thus the devil is able to snatch the Word of God away. This happens on every hand. The gospel is preached to sinners indiscriminately and many of them take no notice of it and have no interest even in hearing more about Jesus Christ. They are not interested enough even to read a gospel pamphlet or to attend a gospel service or an evangelistic Bible study. Thus the devil comes "immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mk. 4:15).

The second type of sinner hears the Word of God with joy but falls away "in time of temptation" because the Word of God was not received deeply into the heart and life and therefore is easily plucked out. Many sinners fall into this category. They express interest in the gospel; they want to learn more; they are excited about the things of Jesus Christ. But their understanding and "faith" is shallow. They don't make the effort to come to full and proper understanding of the gospel, and they are not truly regenerated and soon they fall away because of trouble that they experience from friends and relatives, or they become offended at something they do not agree with. Again, this is not said to be the result of sovereign reprobation but is something that is the responsibility of the sinner himself.

The third type of sinner hears the Word of God, but it is choked out of his heart and life by the "cares and riches and pleasures of this life." Mark's Gospel adds it is "the lusts of other things entering in" that choke the word so that it is unfruitful (Mk. 4:23). This happens often when the gospel is preached. Many sinners who show an interest in the gospel and who attend church services and even profess faith in Christ fall away because they are not serious enough about spiritual matters, and they allow many other things to choke the Word of God out of their hearts and lives. Again, there is not even a hint here that this is the product of sovereign reprobation. It is said to be something that occurs because of the sinner's own response and actions to the gospel.

The fourth type of sinner hears the Word of God and believes it and keeps it and brings forth fruit with patience. This is the only one of the four types of sinners that truly gets saved.

JESUS WAS AMAZED AT THE CENTURION'S FAITH -- "When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Luke 7:9).

Calvinism claims that faith is given to men sovereignly by God as part of the package of sovereign grace in sovereign election. Apparently the Lord Jesus did not hold to this doctrine, because He marvelled at the centurion's faith and commended this faith to the Jews. If faith is the gift of God, what is there to marvel at? Why would Jesus praise the man's "great faith" if it were merely something that God had sovereignly given him?

FAITH IS NOT A WORK -- “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

This verse teaches that, contrary to Calvinism, faith is not a work. Faith is the means whereby the sinner receives the free gift of salvation that was purchased for him by Christ. Faith is the “hand which reaches out to accept God’s gift.” Contrary to Calvinist reasoning, to accept a gift is not a work and is nothing to glory in. A gift is 100% from the one who purchases and offers it. The recipient has nothing to glory in by receiving it.

MEN PERISH BECAUSE THEY DO NOT RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH -- “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

These sinners who follow the antichrist will be damned but not because they are not sovereignly elected and not because they are sovereignly reprobate but because of their personal decision in regard to the truth. They could receive the truth and be saved but they reject it. Words could not be plainer.

THE BELIEVER MUST MAKE HIS CALLING AND ELECTION SURE -- “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

Regardless of whether this verse is interpreted as applying to the saved or to the almost saved, the question for the Calvinist is, “How can sovereign calling and election be made sure by man?” Calvinism teaches that election for salvation is determined solely by God and that He imparts it irresistibly to the sinner through sovereign regeneration and “the gift of faith.” What, then, does this verse mean?

THE PREACHER CAN GAIN MORE SOULS FOR CHRIST BY HOW HE CONDUCTS HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY -- “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. ... To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:19, 22).

Paul sacrificed and went to great efforts so that more men would be saved. If election is sovereignly fore-determined and irresistibly given, this makes no sense. How could Paul’s actions “gain more”? How could his actions “save some”?

PAUL PERSUADED MEN -- “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:11).

If Paul were a Calvinist, he would not have written this because he would know that the elect don't need persuading, and the non-elect can't be persuaded! The sinner is so dead in his sins that apart from regeneration and “the gift of faith” he couldn't possibly understand and respond to human persuasion.

SALVATION CAN BE NEGLECTED -- “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Heb. 2:3).

This exhortation makes no sense in light of Calvinist doctrine. If election is as the Calvinist teaches and it is a matter of an individual being sovereignly chosen by God, how could the elect neglect salvation and how could the non-elect do anything other than neglect salvation?

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS ARE EXHORTED NOT TO HAVE AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF AND NOT TO DEPART FROM THE LIVING GOD -- “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:12-14).

If the elect are predetermined “sovereignly” and if election has nothing whatsoever to do with the sinner himself accepting or rejecting, believing or disbelieving, and if he is irresistibly drawn and sovereignly kept so that he surely perseveres, what could this exhortation possibly mean? How could the sovereignly elected, irresistibly drawn elect depart from God, and how could the non-elect do anything other than depart from God?

WE MUST LABOUR TO ENTER INTO GOD'S REST -- “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:9-11).

How could this exhortation possibly apply to TULIP type election? This passage says the rest of salvation is something that every person must seek to enter into, and all are urged to do so, but the doctrine of “sovereign” election teaches us that those elected to God's rest are predetermined solely by God, and they have no choice in the matter and will assuredly enter into His rest.

**JESUS ENLIGHTENS EVERY MAN THAT COMES INTO THE WORLD --
“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the
world” (John 1:9).**

The Bible teaches that men are in darkness, dead in trespasses and sins, but the Bible plainly teaches that God gives light to every single man that comes into the world. There is no other way to understand the meaning of these words. There is no way to apply this only to the elect. The fact is that God draws men to the light, and if they respond, He gives them more light. That is what we see in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10. The Bible does not say here that the light that God gives to some is more effectual than that which He gives to others. It simply says that He enlightens every single man.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL CONVICT THE WORLD -- “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).

The Calvinist claims that “it is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin” and that “the Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operations and His mission is confined to God’s elect” (Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 75, 77). In fact, the Lord Jesus plainly and unequivocally teaches in John 16 that the Holy Spirit will indeed convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. The Holy Spirit has a special work in this age both toward the unbeliever and toward the believer. There is no good reason to believe that “the world” in this passage is “the elect.” Consider what would happen if we were to change “the world” to “the elect.” The passage would then read: “And when he is come, he will reprove the elect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because the elect believe not on me...” But, of course, the elect do believe on Jesus. Further, the Calvinist teaches that the elect are saved by regeneration rather than by conviction. The truth of the matter is that this important passage describes how the unsaved, which are spiritually dead and blind, are brought to repentance and faith. It is by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. That not all believe is not because only some are pre-elected to believe but because God made man with the ability to resist him and according to the Scripture he has been exercising that ability since the Garden of Eden.

JESUS WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO HIM -- “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (John 12:32-33).

Here the Lord Jesus promised through His crucifixion to draw all men unto Him. Thus we see that He died to make it possible for all men to be saved and that He actively draws all men to Himself toward that end. That all men are not saved is not the fault of Jesus nor is it His intention. All are enlightened and all are drawn. What Jesus said about Israel

is true for all men: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and YE WOULD NOT!" (Mat. 23:37).

These are only a few of Calvin's camels.

My friends, don't swallow these great camels of God's Word. Scriptures are not there to be swallowed or forced into a preconceived theological mold but to be accepted and believed. Whatever divine election means, and it is certainly an important doctrine of the Word of God, it cannot mean what Calvinism concludes because to accept that position requires one to strain at gnats and swallow camels, a practice Jesus forcefully condemned.

For more on this subject see the [The Calvinism Debate](http://www.wayoflife.org), a free eBook available from www.wayoflife.org.

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